Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information · Central News Section · New York

UNITED NATIONS

Prepared by Central News

DH/2105
20 March 1996

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* New walls of misunderstanding in post cold-war period cast compatriots against one another, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says.

* Secretary-General to send fact-finding mission to Nigeria, at request of Nigerian Government.

* Secretary-General in message of sympathy to China expresses condolences to families of earthquake victims.

* Following visit to Geneva, Secretary-General now in Paris.

* Asian Pacific Forum calls for re-invention of economic structure of cities.

* WFP chartered ship carrying food shipment to Democratic People's Republic of Korea, sinks in Taiwan Strait in stormy weather.

* Rome seminar appeals to donor community to reduce demands on limited human resources of post-conflict governments.

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The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Jose Ayala Lasso says new walls of misunderstanding in the post-cold-war period have cast peoples of the same countries against one another. They have also brought an explosion of terrorist acts with their many civilian victims, and have led to genocide and other mind-boggling and reprehensible acts. Addressing the 1996 session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Mr. Ayala Lasso urged the panel to find effective ways to respond to these threats, which otherwise can reverse hard-won progress over the last 50 years. He said international measures to promote human rights should not be seen as an infringement on nations, but as valuable assistance towards a common goal.

On the question of reform of the human rights machinery. Mr. Ayala Lasso said the process of reform can only be successful if the necessary financial and human resources are provided. The United Nations Human Rights programme had obviously been affected by the grave financial crisis confronting the Organization. The already extremely limited resources which were allocated for Human Rights in the regular budget for 1996/1997 had to be reduced by 2.7 million or approximately 6 per cent. There is absolutely no doubt that this reduction carries the risk of an adverse impact in the programmes and activities which the programme has entrusted to the office of the High Commissioner and the Centre for Human Rights, he said.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has decided to send a fact-finding mission to Nigeria, at the request of the Nigerian Government. The 4-member mission is expected to leave for the West African nation on 27 March. United Nations Spokesman Ahmad Fawzi said today that the mission is being sent in fulfillment of a mandate which the General Assembly had given the Secretary-General.

The mission therefore will address itself to two issues which are of concern to the international community. First, the trial and execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others including the judicial procedures of the trial in the context of the various international human rights instruments to which Nigeria is a party and of relevant Nigerian law. Secondly, the mission will address itself to the plans of the Government of Nigeria to implement its declared commitment to restore the country to democratic rule. Upon completion of its work, the mission will report to the Secretary-General.

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It was with great sadness that the Secretary-General learned of the earthquake in northwestern China which killed at least 24 people, most of them children. A UN Spokesman said today that the Secretary-General has sent a message of sympathy to the Government of China expressing his condolences to the families of the victims.

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Following his visit to Geneva, the Secretary-General is now in Paris. Before leaving Geneva on Tuesday, Dr. Boutros-Ghali met with the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright. UN Spokesman Ahmad Fawzi says they discussed a number of issues including Iraq, the oil-for-food formula and the talks between the United Nations and the Iraqi Government. They also discussed the financial crisis of the United Nations, a number of questions also currently being discussed by the Security Council, particularly Western Sahara and the situation in Sudan.

Later, the Secretary-General also met Guy Olivier Segond, President of the Council of State of the Canton and Republic of Geneva. Mr. Segond informed the Secretary-General of a number of positive initiatives taken by Geneva to support the work of the United Nations. According to the UN Spokesman Mr. Segond said that Switzerland and Geneva would provide backing for the establishment of a telecommunications centre for humanitarian operations and secondly, he said that Geneva would back the organization in an event to mark the International year for the Eradication of Poverty. The Secretary-General on his part, said that Geneva was an important centre for the United Nations, for human rights and it was home to the second largest UN headquarters.

The Secretary-General also conferred with President Paul Biya of Cameroon, during which they discussed the recently launched UN System-wide Initiative for Africa. They also considered problems in Africa, including the situations in Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

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The Second Asian Pacific Forum has called for a re-invention of the economic structure of cities. It has also urged that urban policies should recognize the poor as an economic and social asset and not merely as a liability. The 5-day Forum also adopted a recommendation calling for the provision of access to education and information to the poor in order to create awareness of choices and opportunities. It further called for resources and/or credit for the development of income-generating opportunities for them.

The Forum urged governments to be more responsive to the peoples' real concerns for their cities and non-governmental organizations to enter into genuine partnerships with local and central authorities.

The Forum brought together policy makers, the private sector and research institutions for a discussion of the paper: "Living in Asian Cities: The Impending Crises". The conclusions reached during the meeting will be added to the paper for presentation as the Asia and Pacific input to the second UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II), scheduled for 3 to 14 June in Istanbul, Turkey.

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A ship chartered by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to carry food shipment to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has sunk in the Taiwan Strait in stormy weather, it was announced by the WFP today.

"We express our sadness over this tragic accident and our condolences to the many families who have suffered loss of their dear ones," said Catherine Bertini, Executive Director of the WFP, announcing the sinking of

the ship the Agency had chartered to carry its second shipment, 5,635 tons of rice, to the flood victims in the Democratic Republic of North Korea.

Because of its insurance arrangements, WFP said it can immediately release funds to replace the lost cargo.

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The responsibility of national governments and the international community for ensuring coordination of efforts in a constant partnership was emphasized at a seminar in Rome, on restoring government administrative machinery in situations of conflict. An appeal was also made to the donor community to reduce demands on the limited human resources of post-conflict governments.

The role of the United Nations in coordinating the funding procedures of multiple donors was seen as crucial to the success of post-conflict development efforts. Among the issues raised concerning the rebuilding of the administrative machinery were: creating security and stabilizing the immediate situation; rapid rebuilding of the economy; stimulating investments and establishing governance systems that strive towards consultation, consensus-building, communication, mediation and reconciliation.

Some 50 participants, including government Ministers and senior officials from eight countries and the Palestinian Authority, attended the seminar. Senior United Nations representatives from offices responsible for Cambodia and Somalia also attended.

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